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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: GOS AND ITF CONSIDER CIVILIAN ENGAGEMENT
IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas B. Robertson for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The GOS is currently exploring the idea of sending civilian reconstruction personnel to Herat, Afghanistan, where 29 members of the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) are currently stationed as part of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) within the ISAF mission. The reconstruction options currently being considered include educational infrastructure development, agricultural projects, and the administration of humanitarian aid. Separately, the Slovenia-based International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) is gauging its donors' support for getting involved with building local mine action capacity in Afghanistan. END SUMMARY.

GOS Explores Civilian Reconstruction in Afghanistan

12. (C) During a January 18 meeting with EUR/NCE Deputy Director and PolMiloff, MFA Security Policy Director Stanislav Vidovic told us the GOS was exploring the option of sending civilian reconstruction personnel to Afghanistan to the PRT in Herat where SAF troops are currently deployed. Echoing our MOD interlocutors, Vidovic said that Slovenia would not increase its troop levels within ISAF; however, the GOS was interested in providing civilian assistance to Afghanistan in the area of educational infrastructure development (building schools and other facilities), and in agricultural development (drainage and irrigation). Vidovic noted that the GOS would appoint a National Coordinator for PRTs to take charge of the effort. Vidovic told us that the idea of providing civilian reconstruction aid to Afghanistan was strongly supported by Slovenian Permanent Representative to NATO Matjaz Sinkovec. (NOTE: Sinkovec is purported to have very close ties to Prime Minister Janez Jansa dating from their involvement in the DEMOS movement for Slovenian independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. END NOTE).

ITF to Consider Demining Options in Afghanistan

13. (SBU) During a January 24 lunch with PolMiloff, ITF Director Goran Gacnik and International Operations director Roman Tursic discussed Tursic's November 2005 fact-finding visit to Afghanistan and other potential ITF mine action programs outside Southeastern Europe. Gacnik said he had tasked the entire ITF staff with urgently strategizing a ten-year plan of operations that would extend the ITF's mandate beyond Southeastern Europe after its major operations in the region were completed. (NOTE: USG "matching funds" are specifically earmarked for ITF operations in Southeastern Europe. However, actual demining activities in this region -- vice mine victims assistance -- are due to be completed around 2010-2012. END NOTE).

14. (C) Gacnik also said ITF was considering demining activities on the Libyan-Egyptian and Libyan-Chadian borders, but that these were still preliminary ideas. Asked about the possibility of ITF-contracted demining operations taking place in Darfur, Gacnik replied that these were also being considered but that a more robust and credible peacekeeping force would have to be in place before this would be possible.

15. (SBU) In Afghanistan, Tursic and Gacnik explained that ITF could contribute to mine action programs by sharing its experience with tendering, quality control, and coordination. Gacnik said he had met with two of Afghanistan's Deputy Foreign Ministers: in Zagreb in November 2005 for the meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention; and in Ljubljana in December 2005 for the OSCE ministerial. According to Gacnik, both Deputy Foreign Ministers had expressed interest in ITF's involvement with mine action programs in Afghanistan.

16. (SBU) Tursic explained that ITF was well positioned to share best-practices with the Afghans since the UN's Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) relied on direct contracting with deminers, whereas ITF employed a successful

tendering process that dramatically lowered the costs of demining and promoted competition among demining providers. Tursic further explained that the parcellization of demining agencies in Afghanistan further impeded competition among demining providers, each of which effectively presided over its own "turf." As Tursic explained, introducing competition through a tendering process would promote both greater efficiency and better quality demining.

Comment

17. (C) The center-right government of Prime Minister Jansa has demonstrated that it understands the importance of democracy promotion and security assistance in strategically vulnerable parts of the world -- even if they lie far from Slovenia's borders. While most democracy promotion and reconstruction assistance is still focused on the area of highest strategic concern to Slovenia -- namely, Southeastern Europe -- the Jansa government has shed much of the old insularity and navel-gazing habits that characterized its predecessors. The current options being explored are still in the early stages of deliberation, but they already demonstrate a willingness to devote significant resources to reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan, piggybacking on the ITF's own recent fact-finding mission (and reflecting the close relations between the new ITF Director and the Jansa government). Mission will continue to encourage Slovenia to expand its democracy promotion efforts in tandem with its growing global security role.

18. (SBU) While ITF's transparency and low overhead make it a model for mine actions programs around the world, its mission must remain focused on its donors' (including the USG's) preferences. The ITF's efforts to extend its mission beyond Southeastern Europe reflect its leadership's anxiety over the institution's future once its demining projects in the Western Balkans wind down. We will continue to monitor and report on the ITF leadership's strategic thinking for the future as it looks to engage in other parts of the world.
ROBERTSON

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